

# WASHINGTON HERITAGE REGISTER

## A) Identification

Historic Name: **Cobain, Donald & Wendy, House**

Common Name: **Kurt Cobain's Childhood Home**

Address: 1210 E. First Street

City: Aberdeen

County: Grays Harbor

## B) Site Access (describe site access, restrictions, etc.)

The nominated home is located mid block near the NW corner of E 1st Street and Chicago Avenue in Aberdeen. The home faces southeast one block from the Wishkah River adjacent to an alleyway.

## C) Property owner(s), Address and Zip

Name: Side One LLC.

Address: 144 Sand Dune Ave SW

City: Ocean Shores

State: WA

Zip: 98569

## D) Legal boundary description and boundary justification

Tax No./Parcel: 015000701700 - 11 - Residential - Single Family

Boundary Justification: FRANCES LOT 17 BLK 7 /  
MAP 1709-04

## FORM PREPARED BY

Name: Lee & Danielle Bacon

Address: 144 Sand Dune Ave SW

City / State / Zip: Ocean Shores, WA 98569

Email: leebacon@gmail.com

Phone: 425.283.2533

Nomination Date: June 2021

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## E) Category of Property (Choose One)

- ☒ building    ☐ structure (irrigation system, bridge, etc.)    ☐ district  
☐ object (statue, grave marker, vessel, etc.)    ☐ cemetery/burial site  
☐ historic site (site of an important event)    ☐ archaeological site  
☐ traditional cultural property (spiritual or creation site, etc.)  
☐ cultural landscape (habitation, agricultural, industrial, recreational, etc.)

## F) Area of Significance – Check as many as apply

- ☐ The property belongs to the early settlement, commercial development, or original native occupation of a community or region.
- ☐ The property is directly connected to a movement, organization, institution, religion, or club which served as a focal point for a community or group.
- ☒ The property is directly connected to specific activities or events which had a lasting impact on the community or region.
- ☐ The property is associated with legends, spiritual or religious practices, or life ways which are uniquely related to a piece of land or to a natural feature.
- ☐ The property displays strong patterns of land use or alterations of the environment which occurred during the historic period (cultivation, landscaping, industry, mining, irrigation, recreation).
- ☒ The property is directly associated with an individual who made an important contribution to a community or to a group of people.
- ☐ The property has strong artistic, architectural or engineering qualities, or displays unusual materials or craftwork belonging to a historic era.
- ☐ The property was designed or built by an influential architect, or reflects the work of an important artisan.
- ☐ Archaeological investigation of the property has or will increase our understanding of past cultures or life ways.

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## **G) Property Description**

The Donald and Wendy Cobain House located at 1210 E. First Street, in Aberdeen. The home is located northeast of downtown, the area is one of the working class neighborhoods of the city. The house faces southeast, mid-block near the NW corner of East First Street and Chicago Avenue. It is one block from the Wishkah River adjacent to an alleyway and sits on a flat lot.

Landscaping is limited to a few select hedges, grass in the front and rear yard, a single tree in the backyard and original concrete paver patio in the backyard. In 2018, a six-inch wide aggregate curb was poured to frame the original grass at the front of the house and a yet to be installed house identification plaque.

Not original to the home, the entire property is now enclosed by a black chain link fence. The front fence has been reduced in height with privacy slats removed, and includes a recessed gate walk.

The backyard has one medium sized deciduous tree that provides partial shade over the grass. Grass fills in approximately 60% of the backyard. A six-inch wide aggregate curb was added in 2019 to frame the original patio and walkway. In 2020 the alley side drive and walkway aggregate were repoured to replace the heavily fractured original aggregate for these two areas.

The one and-a-half story home was built c.1923 but has been remodeled as evidenced by layers of wallpaper, paint and trim work. The homes initial remodel occurred in 1973 by Donald Cobain and his father, Leland Cobain. Wendy Cobain was the driving force behind each of the Cobain home remodels. In 1973, Wendy designed and remodeled the family living room and fireplace. In 1983-84, she remodeled the family dining room, main floor bathroom, toddler bedroom and master bedroom. A new closet was built, wainscoting added and new carpet installed throughout.

The home boasts a few original detailing from the early 20th century, but today remains largely unchanged from the Cobain family years in the home. Wendy, and Kurt's two sisters (Kim and Brie'Ann) moved out of the home 1995. It has remained unaltered other than essential repairs.

The house has a shallow pitched front-facing gable roof with boxed eaves and decorative faux cornice returns. The roof is clad in 3-tab asphalt shingles. The exterior of the house is covered with cedar clapboards with a wide exposure. The fixed and sliding aluminum windows have no trim. The house rests on a concrete pier foundation, hidden by corrugated metal skirting.

A small front porch, at the southeast corner of the main façade, has been enclosed and boasts a glass screen door with a single, small side-light. The interior walls of the porch are clad with cedar shingles. A secondary door, Craftsman in design (most likely original to the home) leads to the inside of the house. Entrance to the house is three steps above the ground level via a set of poured concrete steps with no railings. At the rear of the house is an attached single-car garage, access via the adjacent alleyway. The home has no side yards exclusive of a narrow strip of gravel.

Inside the home (from Wendy/Kim remodels), the main living room has orange shag carpet, maple wood paneled walls and acoustical tile ceilings. The focus of the room is a large brick fireplace with black grout. Tucked into the corner of the room is the fireplace with a raised hearth, and brick wall which rises from the floor to the ceiling. A large wood cased opening leads to the dining room. Here the orange carpet continues as well as the acoustical tile ceilings, but the walls are clad in flowered wallpaper with a divided wood wainscoting. Select Cobain family furnishings remain in their original settings within the home.

The kitchen retains period 1970s plywood cabinetry with canary yellow Formica countertops, stainless steel sink, and a carpeted flooring in a busy orange and rust floral pattern. The back kitchen door leads to the attached garage, a remodeled mud room and access hallway. The one car garage has a poured monolithic natural finish concrete floor throughout. A dozen large dark aged wood planks measuring 2"x14" x 48"-60" long, line the floor at front of garage where Kurt practiced/played.

The garage walls/ceiling are clad with vertical cedar boards and/or skinned with smooth plywood. The main walls are clad with the aluminum skinned commercial freezer panels attached to three sides of the garage and approximately 8' tall each. These panels were installed by Kurt with the goal to quiet down the "volume" of the practice sessions that were taking place in the garage while playing his guitar, and/or with his friends playing.

Traversing back through the kitchen/dining room into the main hallway, the first floor bedroom (to the left) was originally used as a toddler bedroom for Kurt, then his sister Kim three years later, and then his half sister Brie'Ann. This bedroom has painted white beadboard walls with painted darker mint green trim and wood laminate flooring. The closet is white beadboard with painted darker mint green trim and doors.

Moving back through the hallway to the parent's bedroom, the orange shag carpet continues but changes to hunter green carpet in the parents bedroom. The walls have

walnut wainscoting and painted cream color white paneling. Inside this bedroom is a hand-built closet, designed and personally constructed by Wendy.

Original five panel wood doors with hardware are present in the bedrooms and bathroom of the first floor. The bathroom has a peach motif with a clawfoot tub, floral wallpaper, vinyl flooring, white acoustical ceiling and painted white beadboard wainscoting.

The stairs leading up to the second floor consist of brown/tan pattern shag carpet loosely fitted on the stairs. The upstairs den between the bedrooms has harvest gold carpeting, and cedar roof shingles (in a staggered pattern) and wood cedar boards clad the walls and ceiling.

The bedroom to the rear of the house was his sister's Kim, and is adorned with powder blue walls with the alley facing wall clad in two sheets of maple wall paneling that was added during essential restoration in 2020. This room has attic knee walls on two sides. This room has angled ceiling lines and a patterned white Artex spiral finish. This room has a brown multi-tone low shag carpet partially covering the room. Carpet padding is present and spans the entire room.

At the front of the home is Kurt's bedroom with cream-colored gypsum ceilings and walls. The flooring consists of partially painted brown wood fir planking. The room has attic knee walls on two sides. Original hardware and doors are present for both upstairs bedrooms and closet. Heating for the home is supplied via the fireplace and supplemental electric baseboard heaters in several of the rooms.

## **H) Significance**

The Donald and Wendy Cobain House in Aberdeen is historically significant for its direct connection to Grunge music icon, Kurt Cobain. The nominated house served as his childhood home during Cobain's formative childhood years from 1968 to 1984. It was here that the young blue eyed, blond-haired, energetic young boy with unusual artistic skills, and a widely creative imagination, garnered his passion for music. The house gave Kurt Cobain a place to self-teach, practice, and experiment, as well as learn how to play a variety of musical instruments. Such tasks gave Kurt the pivotal groundwork for his later mastery of song writing, singing, and playing guitar for the prolific band, Nirvana.

Kurt Donald Cobain was born in Aberdeen at Grays Harbor Hospital, on February 20, 1967 to Donald and Wendy Cobain. His family initially lived in a small converted garage at 2830-1/2 Aberdeen Avenue in Hoquiam. Donald Cobain, was an auto mechanic and Wendy Cobain (maiden name Fradenburg), was a housewife.

The Fradenburg's were a musical family. One of Wendy's sister's Mari Earl (Fradenburg), was a singer in a local band, and Wendy's brother, Chuck Fradenburg, played in a band 60s band called The Beachcombers. In addition, Kurt's great uncle, Delbert Fradenburg, was an Irish tenor who appeared in the 1930 film "King of Jazz."

In 1968, the family moved to 1210 E. First Street in Aberdeen when Kurt was only a few months old. The home is where Kurt would spend the majority of his childhood and teenage years. He attended the nearby Robert Gray Elementary School and later Weatherwax High School.

At a very young age, Kurt exhibited strong interest and abilities in art, singing and music. As young as age 2, Kurt could be seen playing with drums, strumming his childhood electric blue guitar, or tapping keys on his toy piano. Interestingly, as Kurt grew up over the years, the choices of instruments he liked to play stayed very familiar, Kurt played guitar(s), drums in school and the family upright piano in the living room.

In addition to Kurt's undeniable gravity towards instruments, he discovered how interesting a cassette recorder could be to experiment with. Early audio recordings of Kurt, capture him singing along to songs from The Monkees, and putting together his own childhood verses to a self-made song that was inspired by the Motorcycle Song sung by Arlo Guthrie. As a child, he also loved to listen to songs by The Beatles, and the band would become a lifelong musical influence to Kurt.

On April 24, 1970, Donald and Wendy Cobain gave birth to a girl, Kimberly Dawn Cobain. Kurt now had a sister and they would become playful as loving siblings growing up so close in age would be.

As Kurt moved through his early childhood years, his curiosity, natural skills in music and art were developing. He was a natural artist and he was very proud of his cartoon character picture making skills. Drawing pictures, making up his own songs to sing and playing with musical instruments became the common daily ritual for young Kurt around the house.

At age 9 Kurt's parents unexpectedly divorced, splitting the kids into two separate households. Kurt went to live with his father in Montesano (and a few different relatives), and Kim lived with their mother in the nominated house. During this time, Kurt regularly stayed at the home with his mom and sisters and at age 14, he moved back to the home at 1210 E First Street to live full time.

Kurt's interest in music through these years was ever expanding and he enjoyed listening to the Beatles, ELO, Queen, Aerosmith, Iron Maiden, Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, and other popular bands. As his taste in music evolved, so did his interest in playing guitar even more seriously.

On Kurt's 14th birthday in 1981, his Uncle Chuck gave Kurt the choice of a bike or a guitar as his birthday gift. Kurt chose the guitar and his uncle purchased him a used Lindell electric guitar that was sunburst colored. He truly loved this guitar and it became somewhat of an extension of his personality. Reportedly Kurt took the guitar with him everywhere he went and could be seen walking down the streets of Aberdeen with it, going to school and carrying it with him whenever possible.

While attending Weatherwax High School, his interest in music, songs, drums, guitars and art was now in full ignition mode. His favorite classes in High School were without surprise to anyone that knew Kurt, were "Art and Music." When not attending high school, Kurt spent hours upon hours practicing guitar and experimenting with different sounds, sound effects and recording tapes of himself at the home. He surrounded himself with all things music. His bedroom, the den, the dining room, living room, family room and of course "the garage" were all spaces that Kurt used for his musical "preflight" practice zones. Learning the riffs from some of his favorite songs, practicing notes, writing songs and listening to the language of the guitar became his passionate obsession.

Early on, as a left handed guitar player, Kurt quickly learned how to string and tune right hand guitars for left hand playing, especially with left hand guitars somewhat of a unicorn to find anywhere. In fact, finding left hand guitars in the years following would be a topic of conversation the band would recall during interviews. During the early years, after Nirvana had finished their show in whatever city they were in, the band often scoured the city pawn shops or music stores to see if they might come across a "lefty" that Kurt could use. Occasionally they would find one and it became a regular hunt for the band, before they had access to guitar techs and resources to order the gear precisely to specification. That privilege would arrive a few years later, shortly after the release and massive success of the Nevermind album.

Kurt's passion for practicing, writing songs, playing piano and teaching himself guitar ignited a discipline to practice and "practice more." Kurt was relentless about practice and knew that it was a vital component to making a good musician/band - great. The garage at the nominated home was used by Kurt and his friends as the typical garage band practice zone. The only difference with the garage, is that "Kurt Cobain" was the one "practicing the riffs" and pushing the garage wall sound insulation to its maximum limits. The walls of the garage are clad with the aluminum wall panels that were removed from a large commercial freezer. These wall panels provided a desperately needed sound insulation barrier so Kurt could push his guitar amplifier to its upper limits without upsetting the neighbors...or so he thought!

As Kurt's guitar playing became more advanced/improved, so did his creative layers of interest in alternative music, sounds and the mixing of sounds to produce different effects. He took every opportunity to watch other garage bands practice and was known to join in with them from time to time. In the summer of 1983 Kurt met Buzz

Osborne of the local punk band, the Melvins, and could often be found at practice sessions at drummer Dale Crover's house at 609 W. Second Street in Aberdeen.

During this time Kurt's schooling in Aberdeen continued in a series of fits and starts before he finally dropped out of Weatherwax High School permanently, just weeks before his senior graduation.

Kurt spent much of 1984 and 1985 living a nomadic life. He sometimes slept in a cardboard box on Dale Crover's porch in Aberdeen, in the waiting room at Grays Harbor Community Hospital, in the hallways of the Morck Hotel, or inside a select building or two in town.

Kurt eventually found work at the Lamplighter Restaurant in Grayland, on the south beach of the ocean, and by 1985, he was working as a janitor at Weatherwax High, earning enough to rent an apartment at 404 N Michigan Street. That fall, Kurt moved into the Lamont Shillinger residence at 408 W. First Street in Aberdeen for a few months.

In early 1985, Kurt formed Fecal Matter. The band initially featured Kurt singing and playing guitar; the Melvins drummer, Dale Crover, playing bass; and Greg Hokanson playing drums. The band however was short-lived and disbanded the following year.

It was during this time that Kurt met a tall guitarist named Krist Novoselic who lived across the Young Street Bridge on top of Think-Of-Me Hill at 1120 Fairfield Street. Krist's mother operated a hair salon in town (Maria's Hair Design) at 107 S. "M" Street where the emerging band would later sometimes practice together.

On September 1, 1986, Kurt moved into the "first house" he rented alone at 1000-1/2 E. Second Street. To pay the rent, he worked part-time as a maintenance man at the Polynesian Inn Resort at Ocean Shores. By the spring of 1987, Cobain, Novoselic, and drummer Aaron Burckhard formed a new band called the Sellouts, performing Creedence Clearwater Revival tunes at local bars. The fledgling band's first public performance as a group was in 1987 at a house party in Raymond. Seeking larger music venues, in May, Cobain and Novoselic moved to Olympia.

In 1988, the band agreed on the name Nirvana and released their first track, *Love Buzz*. Some of the initial reviews for Love Buzz were negative, describing the band as "like Lynyrd Skynyrd without the flare."

Following the release of *Love Buzz*, Aaron Burckhard was replaced by Chad Channing on drums and the band began making headway in Seattle's music scene. On January 1, 1989, Nirvana's was signed by Sub Pop Records. That same year they released their first album, *Bleach*. While *Bleach* failed to make a big initial mainstream impression, the band continued to gain more music/industry experience through the process and kept moving forward.



Kurt's songwriting skills and reputation were growing steadily amongst the local music scene. What no one in the band (or their record label Sub Pop) knew at that time, was that their hallmark blend of heavy metal, punk and pop sound would be set in permanent motion just two years later, with the launch of their second album "Nevermind."

As the band forged on, 1990 became a significant year for Kurt and the rest of Nirvana. Kurt met rocker Courtney Love (his future wife) at a Portland nightclub in 1990, but their romantic relationship would develop later. Nirvana also got the opportunity to tour with Sonic Youth that year and after one final drummer change, brought in former Scream band member Dave Grohl to replace Chad Channing on drums.

On April 30, 1991, Nirvana signed with a major record label, Geffen Records. In May-June of that year, Nirvana finished the recording for their second album *Nevermind* at Sound City Studios in Van Nuys, CA. Note that the band actually started recording tracks for their second album back in 1990, with Butch Vig at Smart Studios in Madison, Wisconsin.

Shortly after the final *Nevermind* recordings were wrapped in California, Kurt was at the home in Aberdeen visiting with his family and he played one of the songs from the soon to be released second album (Nevermind). That little unheard song that he played for his mom was titled "Smells Like Teen Spirit!"

On September 24, 1991, Nirvana released their second studio album, *Nevermind*, which henceforth gave them their "Grunge" label. Nirvana's single "Smells Like Teen Spirit" became their biggest hit, pushing their album to no. 1 on the music charts and establishing Kurt Cobain as a uniquely original musical icon of his era.

On February 24, 1992, a few days after the conclusion of Nirvana's "Pacific Rim" tour, Cobain and Love were married on Waikiki Beach in Hawaii. The couple's daughter, Frances Bean Cobain, was born a few months later on August 18, 1992.

On September 13, 1993, Nirvana would go on to release their third and final album, *In Utero*. While the band and especially Kurt as the front man, had gained worldwide recognition, Kurt was also dealing with a personal drug addiction. On April 8, 1994, an electrician discovered the body of Kurt Cobain in an area above his detached garage, at 171 Lake Washington Boulevard in Seattle (garage has since been demolished). At a mere 27 years old, a private memorial was held in Seattle for his family and closest friends.

Kurt's death shook the music world and much of the nation. His death has been compared to the death of John Lennon in the impact it had on the music scene and, especially, on those fans of Cobain's generation whose lives had been deeply

influenced by his work. His lyrics were so creative, raw, interesting and unexpectedly magnetic. Coupled with the catchy rhythm hooks, the music pulled a listener in quickly through melodies that would roller coaster your emotions with an unanticipated grace.

Cobain and the band's stripped down songs and authentic approach, ignited an overnight atomic shift in music that "changed everything," as has been described by many that experienced the era and true significance of events that occurred. This sea change of events started when the Nirvana's *Nevermind* album was released setting a new course for music that never reverted back to revisit "the prior" at any point since.

Henry Rollins the lead singer from the punk rock band Black Flag said in an interview when he described what occurred during that time with Kurt Cobain, "you turned on MTV and here he was, Kurt...just this normal looking guy in torn jeans and a Tshirt, he looked like you, dressed just like you, wrote songs about everyday you...and sung them to you.....you could not help but to feel... "he was you."

Nirvana songs were unorthodox, simple yet complicated, raw sounding, with Punk-Pop overtures. There was a sudden awareness (and disorientation) for "Glam" or the corporate produced music/rock band(s), especially the bands with the biggest hair, boldest eyeliner, and myriad of music videos broadcasted by MTV that objectified women. Many, of these bands, found themselves unexpectedly "obsolete" by the industry, record labels and fans, almost overnight.

Author Rick Lyon (Hardrock) wrote about the impact of Nirvana: "A truly seismic shift in popular culture happened but no one involved had any idea that what they were doing would fundamentally change the world, spelling the commercial death of an entire musical genre and usher in what was the last true rock 'n' roll youth movement."

In addition, to the social and music sea change, fashion and ultimately the fashion industry didn't want to get left out. The clothing that Kurt Cobain wore as his everyday clothes, became unplanned staples to the influence he cast. Kurt's style plainly put, was simple and practical, it consisted of wearing thrift store cardigans, plaid flannels, T-shirts with his favorite bands, torn jeans and worn out Converse shoes.

The home remained in the Cobain family for five decades, from the years 1968-2018. In early 2018, Kim and Wendy sold the home to Lee and Dani Bacon, local residents of Grays Harbor, who have a deep appreciation to music history.

In mid 2018, working with the family, the Bacon's began a comprehensive artifact refurbishing and restoration plan to reset the home to the years the family lived there. The restoration is based on meticulously accurate "storytelling" of each room through original furnishings and décor, family photographs, instruments, equipment, interviews, audio recordings, video recordings and artifacts.

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## I) Documentation

Xerox and attach any information or evidence that supports the property's significance.

**Written Sources** (*books, articles, newspapers*):

"Kurt Cobain Lived Here: An Aberdeen Tour of Memorials, Homes of the Late Nirvana Frontman" – Graysharbertalk.com, July 15, 2014.

"Kurt Cobain's Childhood Home in Aberdeen Washington" - Rockandrolloradmap.com, December 28, 2015.

Augustyn, Adam. "Biography – Kurt Cobain", Encyclopedia Britannica.

"Cobain, Kurt (1967-1994)" – Historylink.org essay.

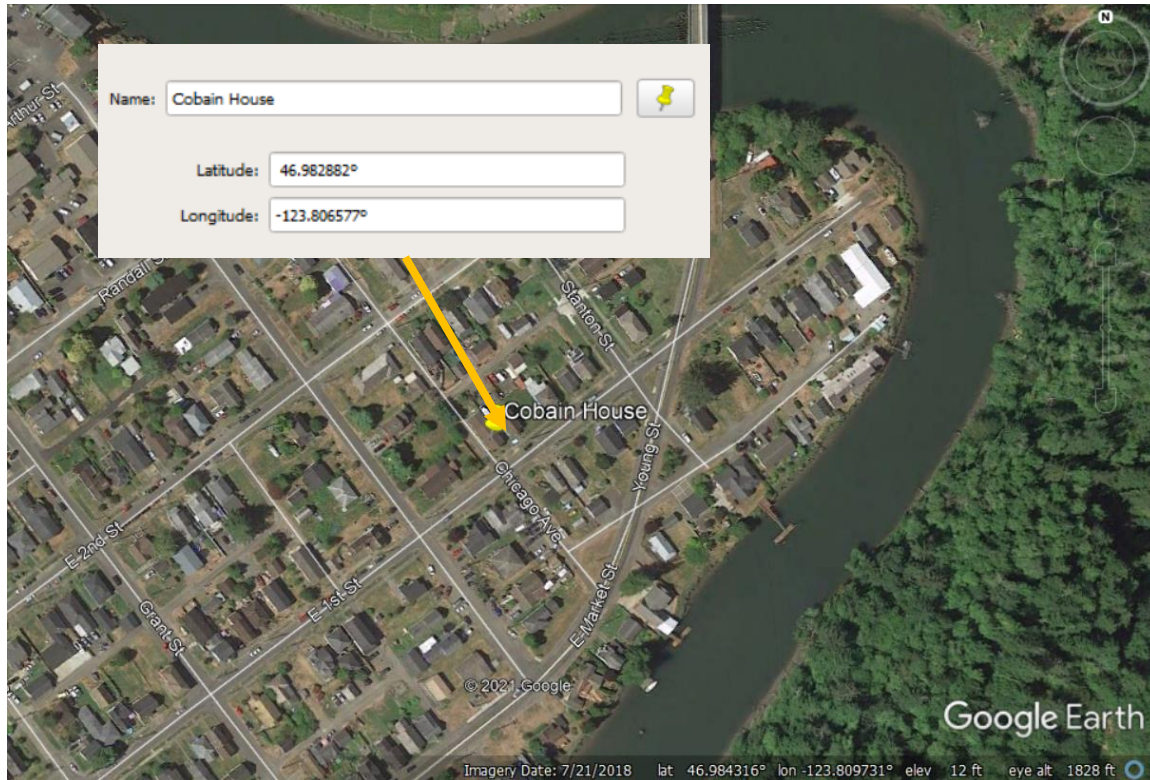
Browne, David. "Forget Guitars. Buy a Rocker's Childhood Home" – Rollingstone.com, August 22, 2019.

Lyon, Rick "Nirvana Signs to a Major (or how Kim Gordon Saved the world). "  
January 4, 2017

<https://rpm.hardrock.com/nirvana-signs-to-a-major-or-how-kim-gordon-saved-the-world/>

## J) Map and Photographs

*Attach copies of historic maps or photos if available, and current photos ( 5 x 7 B & W). Include a current map – appropriate U.S.G.S. map and parcel map – with the location of the property and its boundaries clearly marked. (see instructions)*

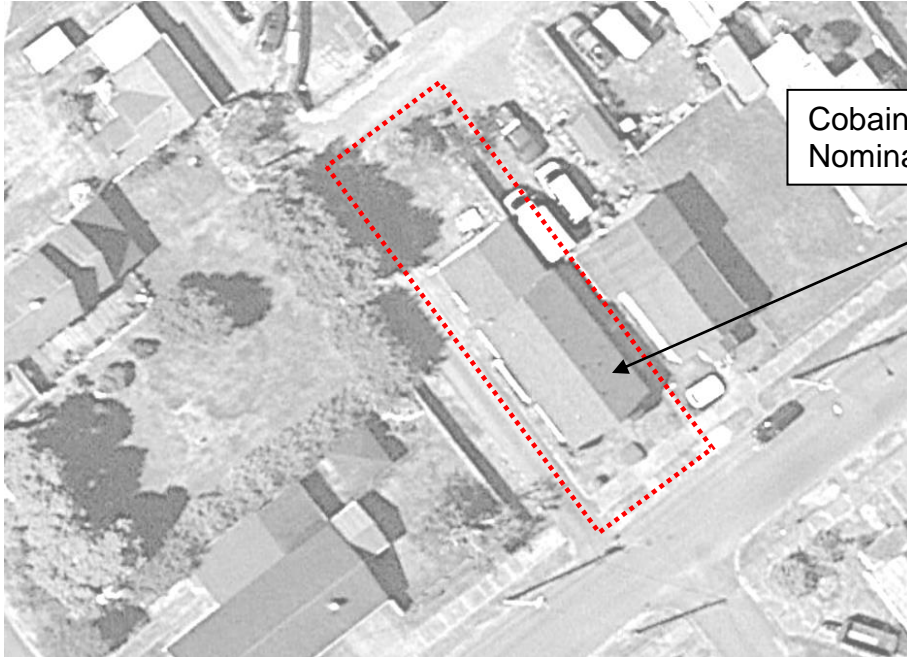


### Google Earth Map

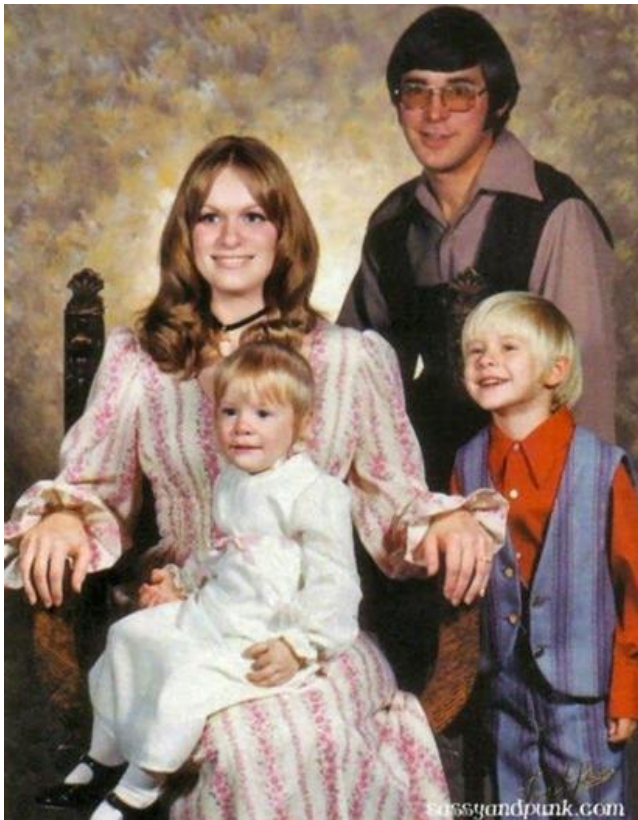
Cobain House

1210 E 1<sup>st</sup> Street

Aberdeen



Cobain House –  
Nominated boundaries



Cobain family photo.  
ca.1974. Seated Wendy  
and Kim on lap. Standing  
Donald and Kurt.



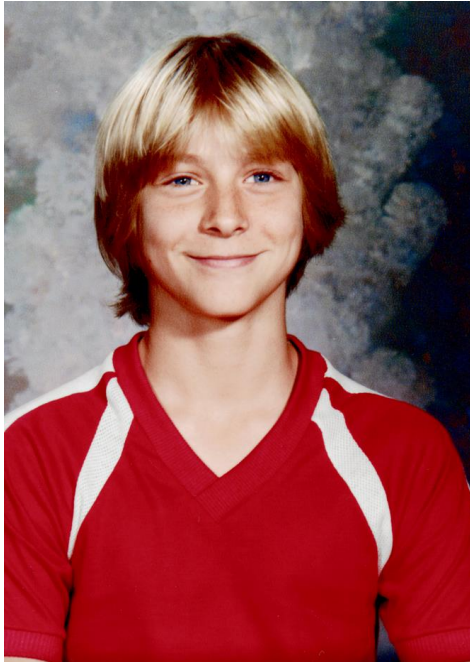


Kurt Cobain at family home helping to install new cedar siding. ca.1973.



Kurt Cobain practicing drums. ca.1980.

Below: Kurt Cobain age 14.  
Right: Kurt practicing guitar in  
the upstairs den of nominated  
home. ca.1983



Kurt practicing guitar in at Montesano High School. ca.1982



Kurt Cobain Aberdeen Police mug shot at 19 years old.







Kurt Cobain age 19.

On March 19, 1988, Nirvana played their first stage show as the band Nirvana. Before that landmark show, they went by several names including Skid Row, Ted Ed Fred, Pen Cap Chew, and Bliss among others. But the trio decided to go with Nirvana for their show at Tacoma's Community World Theater.

Kurt created this poster to promote the show.

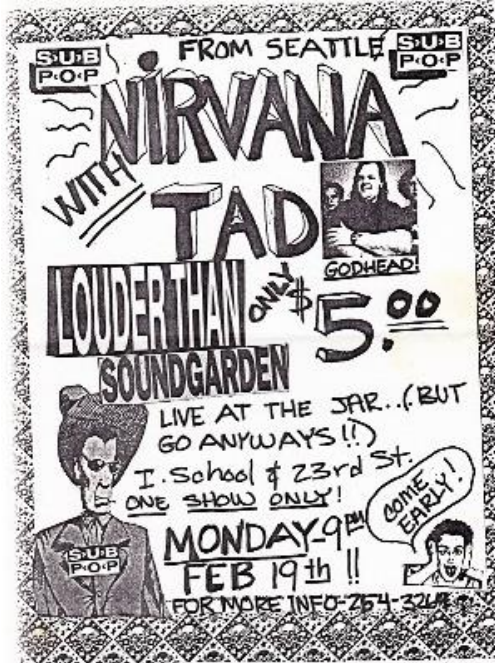


Nirvana March 1987 first Show. 17 Nussbaum Road (house party), Raymond, WA



TAD / NIRVANA - 1989 CONCERT FLYER - Bleach tour - Cobain designed flyer from an England concert from October 30, 1989.





Concert flyer for the Nirvana / Tad concert in Phoenix, AZ on February 19, 1990.



Nirvana first studio album, released June 15, 1989.



1992 MTV Video Music Awards - Dave Grohl, Kurt Cobain and Krist Novoselic of Nirvana.  
(Photo by Kevin Mazur Archive/WireImage) – Getty Image

## Current Images of Cobain House





